DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 067 956 FL 003 605

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TITLE	Teaching Cross-Cultural Understanding.
PUB DATE	22 Apr 72
NOTE	12p.; Paper presented at Fontbonne Coll., St. Louis, Mo., April 22, 1972
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS	*Bilingual Education; *Cross Cultural Training; Educational Objectives; Instructional Program Divisions; *Language Instruction; *Modern Languages; *Teacher Attitudes; Teaching Methods

ABSTRACT

Fundamental prerequisites for successful cross-cultural instruction in language programs are outlined in this paper. Attainment of instructional objectives is seen to be dependent on teacher attitudes and educational preparation. Problems confronting language teachers attempting to attain a measure of sophistication in the theory of cross-cultural instruction are discussed. Several successful bilingual programs for young children are briefly reviewed. Concluding remarks point out that the teaching of culture requires both precept and example. (RL)

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TEACHING CROSS-CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING*

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The hour of reckoning has come. When sometime last fall Bob Cloos phoned to invite me to be your guest and to speak on cross-cultural understanding, April 22 seemed a long time off and the topic challenging. So, recklessly I said yes. And now it's too late for either you or me to regret it.

During the last few weeks I've tried to get my mind on the subject in the brief intervals between other pressing tasks. The more I have considered the topic the more difficult it has seemed to me. Lunching with colleagues, I've invited their suggestions only to get looks of pity. Add to this the fact that this subject has already been dealt with by such an expert as Ned Seelye, and you can imagine how my discomfiture has grown until now I regard the subject as scarcely less difficult than, say, "How to Eliminate War as an Instrument for Resolving International Disputes." Hardly on a par with "How to Teach the Subjunctive," what?

One way to deal with our subject would be to read all that has been written on it, to point out the shortcomings of this material, and to demonstrate how much more satisfactory are one's own conclusions. This is indeed the scholarly approach. The trouble is that I have not had time to do this, even if I had the ability. This left me with only one recourse: to avoid the views of others, which might be only

FL003 605

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*A paper presented at Fontbonne College, St. Louis, Missouri, April 22, 1972, at a meeting of foreign language teachers sponsored by the Department of Modern Foreign Languages and Literatures and the Extension Division of the University of Missouri-St. Louis, in cooperation with the Foreign Language Teachers Association of Greater St. Louis.

a hindrance, and to try to think out my own views on the subject. It is this latter approach which I have attempted, for better or for worse. So let's plunge into the troubled waters of the classroom, of school and society, of human knowledge and ignorance, of man's wretchedness and nobility, of war and peace--for grappling with the concept of cross-cultural understanding will inevitably involve us deeply with basic human issues.

I am conscious of the fact that what draws us together is a common concern for the teaching of FLs and of matters related to them. I wonder what languages are represented here. Is there anyone teaching Classical Greek? How many teach Classical Latin? And what about the neo-Latin languages? How many teach French? Italian? Portuguese? Spanish? And the Germanic languages? How many teach German? Dutch? A Scandinavian language? Slavic languages? Russian? English as a second language? English as a second dialect? How many teach a non-European language? How many teach bilingually or in a bilingual program? How many teach in an elementary school? In a secondary school? In an undergraduate school? In a graduate school? And finally is there anyone who teaches such related subjects as linguistics, anthropology, psychology, sociology, social studies?

Now that we know, in a superficial way, who we are, let's consider the classroom, where we do an important part of our professional work. I shall not discuss the actual teaching of cross-cultural understanding; the desirability of including such a component in our FL teaching--on which I take it we all agree--or methods and techniques for teaching and testing cultural understanding; I assume that these subjects have been

adequately dealt with in Ned Seelye's lecture, in the ACTFL Pre-Conference Workshop on Culture last November, and in the writings of Brooks, Nostrand, Seelye, and others, with which you are familiar. I should like for my part to invite your attention to the formation of appropriate cultural attitudes, especially on the part of the teacher, with the thought that the example set by a teacher is at least as important as the overt instructing that he does.

One obvious prerequisite to success in teaching culture--or indeed any other subject--is genuine interest in the subject. The more intellectual is a teacher's curiosity, the more compulsive his drive to know, the more enthusiastic his eagerness to share his discoveries, the better for his students--at least for those who have a potential interest and desire to learn. How to avoid being dragged down by the others is another subject. But assuming reasonable student motivation, a teacher can expect, other factors being equal, that his own appetite for learning will trigger a parallel response on the part of his students.

Scholarly mastery of a subject as complex and as delicate as cross-cultural understanding places on the language teacher a responsibility undreamed of in the past. Today's language teacher may well be moved to envy the traditional teacher of the last century, who entered the classroom, sat down at his desk, took the reading text from the drawer, opened it at the dog-ear, and said in English, "Very well, let's begin on page 5, line 10. Miss Johnson, will you read aloud the first five lines and then translate into English?" I wonder if there is any one nearly enough my contemporary to have shared such an experience? The grammar-translation approach which used to be traditional in most modern-language teaching is, I suppose, still considered appropriate for Latin, is it not?

I believe that the majority of modern-language teachers have moved to the communication stage of language instruction, have breathed some life into the language to the point of asking questions and expecting answers in it. We may not have much historical perspective on our language, we may not be too sure of the difference between a phone and a phoneme, and we may feel entirely lost in a discussion involving descriptive, structural, or transformational linguistics, but at least we know that Chinese, French, German, Japanese, and Spanish are real live languages used for conducting everyday affairs and that if we are going to communicate with a monolingual speaker of any one of these languages or of the 50-odd other languages that are spoken natively in such centers as Chicago and St. Louis we are going to have to learn by imitation and practice to understand and speak these languages.

Time was when it was quite enough for us to know the grammar of another language and to approximate its pronunciation--what has been called, somewhat disparagingly, knowing <u>about</u> a language. Then society raised the bar on the language teacher by expecting greater oral proficiency and by including a course on applied linguistics in the NDEA institutes, thus requiring of the teacher both greater knowledge and greater skill. More recently the bar has once more been lifted; and teachers are now expected to have not only a native-like command of a language but also some familiarity with the culture of the language group. Most teacher-preparing programs, at least on the graduate level, now include a course on sociolinguistics, thus increasing the knowledge component; and we are coming closer and closer to the point of requiring of prospective teachers a period of residence in the country where the language is spoken, in order to increase their skill in cross-cultural relations as well as in language.

It is also generally agreed that teachers are being urged in this direction not only by teacher trainers but also by students, who are more interested in a foreign culture than they are in a foreign language.

The result is that the modern-language teacher of the future will be expected to have as great cultural as linguistic sophistication. Of course I don't mean to suggest that the modern-language teacher is a victim of outside pressures, for the pressure from within individual teachers and from teachers' organizations is just as great or greater, as witness your program this year.

This urge to excel also has the result of breaking down barriers between academic disciplines. I remember an experience of some fifteen years ago, when I was working with Bill Parker in the MLA office on the FL Program. We were eager to find ways of helping the modern-language teacher in his effort to use his knowledge of language to teach cultural understanding. We turned for assistance to the cultural anthropologists, but they turned a deaf ear to us. Finally the Social Science Research Council, after repeated prodding, agreed to a meeting between a small group of psychologists and anthropologists on the one hand and MLA staff members on the other. To our plea for help they replied that language teachers should not invade their domain and try to teach culture and that they were too busy with their research projects to help us. Some language teachers refused to give up. Howard Lee Nostrand, for example, insisted on educating himself in the social sciences by cultivating and collaborating with colleagues in that field. And individual social scientists have gradually become interested in languages and have been immensely helpful. John B. Carroll, formerly of Harvard and now of the Educational Testing Service, is an educational psychologist interested in both language and culture. Joshua Fishman of Yeshiva University, author of the monumental Language Loyalty in the United States, is a sociologist and socio-linguist who heads a team of language planners working for developing nations. And psychologist Wallace E. Lambert of McGill

University has made an epochal contribution to the cause of education in language and culture by demonstrating that middle-class English-speaking children of five to twelve can double their linguistic and cultural learning by being taught in French by native French-speaking teachers.

To recapitulate, we have seen that there has been a veritable explosion of knowledge in the expanding field of the language teacher so that he is more than ever challenged to keep up, let alone stay ahead of developments in his field. If he is to teach cross-cultural understanding, he must of course first know, and know in some depth, the two languages and the two cultures involved. But though knowledge is a necessary prerequisite of understanding, it is no guarantee of understanding. So before our task is completed, we shall have to examine the nature of understanding.

Turning to Webster, we find the first meaning of understanding to be "the act of grasping mentally" and the second to be "the ability to understand." The third meaning is "the faculty or ability of subsuming the particular under the general or of apprehending general relations of particulars" etc. These all have to do with knowledge, intelligence, and judgment, all qualities essential to the teacher or other types of leader, but it is the fourth definition that I want to stress: "friendly or harmonious relationship, an agreement of opinion or feeling, adjustment of differences, a mutual agreement not formally entered into but to some degree binding on each side" etc.

Understanding in this last sense seems to me to be a statement of one of the preconditions of peace, that human will of the wisp. As Archibald MacLeish wrote in the famous preamble to the UNESCO Constitution, "Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed." The main point

I want to make today is that we language teachers have the opportunity to begin building in the minds of our students the defenses of peace through knowledge and understanding. Contrary to the Declaration of Independence, which asserts that "all men are created equal," no two human beings are born equal. Every child is born luckier than some and less lucky than others and therefore has a built-in temptation to look down on some of his fellows and to envy others, to lash out in frustration or fight back when he feels abused. The task of socializing the potential little warrior is one that the teacher of languages and cultures shares with other teachers, that teachers share with parents, while at the same time it is a process which takes place naturally as an individual rubs up against other individuals in a great variety of situations.

The language teacher has a natural advantage, however, over others in this socialization process since he can help create understanding not only between individuals or groups but also across cultures. The teacher of language and culture is in a strategic position to emphasize learning situations favorable to cross-cultural understanding and to deemphasize unfavorable factors.

What are some of the factors favorable to such learning? Let me propose the following: 1) The younger a child is the more positive is his response likely to be to a favorable learning situation. 2) The closer the contact between representatives of two cultures in a favorable learning situation the better is the result likely to be. 3) Most likely to succeed is the teacher who can understand each child as an individual and who can empathize with the most diverse types of individuals. 4) The teacher who can himself exemplify an intimate knowledge of two languages and understanding of two cultures is most likely to

succeed in teaching cross-cultural understanding. 5) The teacher who can achieve a close working relationship with parents based on mutual respect is more likely to succeed than one who cannot or does not achieve such a relationship. 6) The teacher who is able and willing to extend his leadership role into the community is most likely to help promote a community attitude favoring cross-cultural understanding.

Let me cite some examples that illustrate one or more of these points. Several papers in a conference on child language last November stress the advantage of early learning. A paper by linguist Ragnhild Söderbergh of the University of Stockholm describes how without pressure she taught her daughter to read between the age of two years four months and three years six months using the Doman method. Glenn J. Doman, Director of the Institutes for the Achievement of Human Potential in Philadelphia, whose book, How to Teach Your Baby to Read, has aroused the enthusiasm of thousands of mothers, contributed to the same conference a paper on the subject "How Brain-Damaged Children Learn to Read," the first three short paragraphs of which I'd like to read to you.

> When you are confronted with a brain-injured two-year-old who is no further advanced than a newborn babe - who gives no evidence of being able to see or hear, let alone crawl or raise his head - teaching him to read isn't the first thing you think about. What you think about is how to get through to him, by any method, on any level.
>
> Young Tommy was such a child. His eyes wouldn't follow you, or follow a light, or work together. A loud noise wouldn't make him start. You could pinch him and get no reaction. In fact, the first time we ever got a reaction out of Tommy was when we stuck pins in him: he smiled. It was a great moment, for us and for him. We had established contact.
>
> That was when Tommy was two. By the time he was four he was reading, and thereby hangs a tale. Let me tell it to you just as it happened, because we didn't set out to teach him to read, it just happened along the way, as part of our overall problem of establishing communication.

In the same conference Roy W. Alford, Jr., Director of the Early Childhood Program of the Appalachia Educational Laboratory in Charleston, West Virginia, described a home-oriented program for three-, four-, and five-year-olds based on a TV program five days a week, an hour-and-a-half visit to ten locations by a mobile unit once a week, and a half-hour home visit by a paraprofessional once a week. The implications of this program are sketched by Dr. Alford in his final paragraph:

> The Appalachia Educational Laboratory Early Childhood Education Program was developed for the rural child. It can, however, be used in many areas of the United States where children are not presently being reached by existing preschool programs. Multi-ethnic groups have been identified as possible recipients, as have isolated American Indians, bilingual children, Chicanos, migrants, rural southern blacks, and mountain children. All of these might be characterized as children who seldom are encouraged to develop a healthy self-concept and pride in their cultural heritage.

In another paper Mrs. Rosa G. de Inclán, Consultant for Bilingual Education in Dade County, Florida, describes the highly respected bilingual program there which features the close contact between two languages and cultures, and concludes that "...children and older students involved in a bilingual school organization of instruction lose absolutely nothing in terms of English language skills. If, in addition, we consider the enormous gains involved in bilingualism for the individual destined to live in a bilingual or in a pluralistic society, the choice for educators in leadership positions appears to be obvious."

I want to cite similar evidence contained in a paper describing the renowned home-school language-switch program in St. Lambert, near Montreal. In this program, now in its sixth year, middle-class English-speaking children beginning in kindergarten receive all of their instruction in and through French. I quote from the conclusions drawn on the basis of the 1971 testing:

> In the spring 1971 testing, when the Experimental groups had moved up to the grade IV and V levels we surveyed their attitudes in greater detail and compared them with the English Control classes. Here it became very evident that the Experimental children are able to use the French language so effectively that they communicate with and establish satisfying friendship with French-speaking people. Thus, in contrast to the English Control children, they have developed sufficient language competence to enable them to enter into the French Canadian sphere of social activities, to understand and appreciate French people and French ways to a much greater degree, and to consider themselves as being both French and English Canadian in make-up. Furthermore, they are extremely satisfied with the French program offered them at school and reject the idea of switching now to an all-English program. In contrast, the Control pupils who have had no French training, other than a standard FLES program, feel they have had too much French, and react much more favorably to the idea of switching to a school program without any French at all.
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> Finally, there is no evidence that the self-concepts of the Experimental pupils are confused in any way.

And finally, the best of the approximately 200 bilingual programs which have sprung up throughout the country give great hope of producing children educated in two languages and sensitive to two cultures. It will be interesting to see whether we teachers have the knowledge, the awareness, and the will to harness some of the vast linguistic and cultural resources that we have and to build them harmoniously into our educational system. Can the fast-dwindling French resources in northern New England and Louisiana be revivified? Can Navajo and at least a dozen other Indian and Eskimo languages acquire a worthy place in our educational system so that their speakers may, with pride in their heritage, also feel at ease in the dominant Anglo-American culture? Is it possible for us to give to the Chinese, Japanese, and Filipinos of our West Coast and Hawaii a feeling of security in their languages and cultures and of mutual respect in their contacts with their dominantly English-speaking neighbors? Can we learn to respect, understand, and to a degree share in the cultures of our Spanish-speaking fellow Americans; and can the Cuban, Puerto Rican, Mexican American, and other Spanish-speaking groups learn to respect their differences while working together for their common good?

Let me quickly summarize. I believe that the foreign-language teacher has become acutely aware that language and culture are intimately bound together and that this lays on him a responsibility to teach culture as well as language. Cultural knowledge is almost infinitely complex, but even more elusive is cultural understanding, depending as it does on attitudes. Once he is aware of these complexities and is willing to wrestle with them, the language teacher is, I believe, in a peculiarly favorable position to teach, as much by example as by precept, cross-cultural understanding based on the knowledge of and respect for two languages and two cultures. His teaching efforts will be enhanced if he is aware of the advantage of early learning; if he is able to understand individual children, however different they may be, and to empathize with them, and if he is able and willing to extend his efforts to the parents of his pupils and to the community. By being able to identify the roots of conflict, cultural and other, in the young minds of his pupils he will be better able to plant and cultivate the seeds out of which will hopefully sprout the flowers of better human understanding and thus begin constructing the defenses of future peace.

"But," you may well object at this point, "you haven't really said how to teach cross-cultural understanding. If anything, you have implied that it can't really be taught--except possibly by example."

Well, this is not quite what I have meant to do. I did say that cross-cultural knowledge is both vast and complex, and I very much admire the accumulation of facts and observations which is taking place, e.g., in the Proceedings of the ACTFL Pre-Conference Workshop on Culture which was held in Chicago last November. Knowledge in depth of such data is

indeed essential for cultural understanding. My intention is not to minimize the intellectual aspect of culture, for it is indispensable. But neither do I wish to underplay the affective aspect, for I happen to believe that it is not enough to know what cross-cultural understanding is, one must also feel it. Just as we used to say a couple of decades ago that the teacher of language needs not only to know about a language but also how to use it, so it now seems reasonable to say that the teacher of culture needs not only to know about cross-cultural facts but that he also needs to sense the values of a second culture, to develop skill in his cross-cultural relations. Teaching cross-cultural understanding is done by precept and example, requiring both knowledge and skill. Of these I believe the latter is the greater, for it includes the former.